

Roy Black's Keynote Speech
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's
2nd Annual 40 Under 40, Outstanding Lawyers of Miami-Dade County
Saturday, October 2, 2010

I am uniquely qualified to speak to 40 lawyers under 40.

I just missed the cut.

Forty years ago, almost to the day, I took the oath as a lawyer.

It is an honor to be selected to speak to an audience that is so brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous . . . and all far smarter than me.

My question to the forty of you is what is your plan for the rest of your wild and precious life?

I think I am qualified to dispense some hard-earned wisdom.

There are rules I developed for myself; some I will share with you.

Rules I learned the hard way – perhaps the only way to learn them.

Rules forged as iron laws so I would disobey them only with difficulty.

First:

Great achievement comes with a high price, a price most people are not willing to pay. My first job out of school I was totally unqualified for. One of only ten public defenders for Dade County. No time for the luxury of training.

I was sworn in the first day; and on the second day, I started a murder trial.

After the trial, I took a second oath to relentlessly over-prepare for everything. Thus desperation made me a good lawyer.

Reminds me of a football coach who said: "If it doesn't hurt, you're not doing it right."

Second:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a cliché.

Education will not; the world is full of educated nit wits.

Persistence and determination alone are paramount. You must be able to sustain yourself against staggering blows. You must be able to use every cell of will, every iota of brainpower, and every nanosecond of highly focused consciousness.

A man went up to Vladimir Horowitz after a piano recital in Carnegie Hall and said, "I would give half my life to play like that." Horowitz replied . . . "I did."

Third:

The difference between the best and the rest is small.

I recently defended a race car driver. I studied results of the Indianapolis 500 for ten years. The average margin of victory was 1.54 seconds. On average the winner took home \$1,278,813. Second place was \$621,321.

A difference of \$657,492. For 1.54 seconds.

A beautiful, uncomplicated statistic. That should feed our desire.

To make that extra effort. A small thing makes a huge difference. The difference between a pro golfer and a caddy.

The difference between triple A ball and the majors. The difference between the obsessive Peyton Manning and the casual Ryan Leaf. That difference makes you fall just short of the goal.

Or, as that famous Wall Street philosopher Gordon Gecko summed it up:

"Lunch is for Wimps."

Fourth:

Work harder on yourself than you do on your job. Don't wish it was easier; just wish you were better. Don't make excuses. Don't do less than your best.

Never do less than your best. Always let it be said of you that you did the best you could with what you had. And that you used the full expansion of your soul - your heart - your reach. What you did was not just acceptable, but memorable. That you did so well they will measure your stride to see if they can match up.

Let others lead small lives, but not you. Let it be said you developed the gift. You reached the zenith of your potential.

At the end, be able to say, "I fought the good fight. I fought for what was right."

I fought to protect what was important. I used these great skills to help people. People who turn to you in the most desperate moments of their lives.

When their fortune is at risk, when their families are in jeopardy, when they could lose their children, when they could lose their freedom, or even when they could lose their lives.

Become the measure by which success is determined.

Fifth:

My favorite person in history is Winston Churchill. I love to quote him.

"You make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give."

You made it here tonight because you are unique.

We don't look alike. We don't act alike. We don't dress alike. We have

different tastes in the food we eat, the books we read, the cars we drive, and the music we enjoy.

But there is one thing we all have in common: We all know what it means to hurt. Suffering is a universal language. Tears are the same for Jews or Muslims or Christians, for white or black or brown, for children or adults.

We lawyers have the unique power to turn lives around, but that power will be unfulfilled until you have done something for someone who will never be able to repay you. This world desperately needs our skills:

Every 3.5 seconds someone dies of hunger.

Every 11 seconds someone dies of AIDS.

Every 15 seconds a child dies from a waterborne illness.

2 million children die each year for lack of a vaccine.

11 million children die before age 5.

40 million people live with HIV.

There are 153 million orphans in the world.

1 billion people have no access to clean water.

1.1 billion live on less than a dollar a day.

2.6 billion don't have basic sanitation.

If, in the end, all you are remembered for is being a good lawyer, then you will have failed the rest of your life.

The final attribute, without which all the others are worthless, is courage. We are fortunate tonight to have with us the symbols of courage.

The courage of parents of children with Cystic Fibrosis. It is the courage of parents who arise every day and go to sleep every night with a prayer on their lips:

"Please God, in your infinite mercy, spare my precious child."

It is the courage of living with a child plucked from birth to begin dying.

To helplessly watch her sapped of energy, denied the joy of a normal childhood.

It is the courage to be steadfast when she suffers the pain, the hacking coughs, the hospitalizations, the bruised arms from hundreds of intravenous punctures.

It is the courage that answers the small voice: "Why am I sick? Why can't I play like the other children?" And worst of all, "Mommy, Daddy, am I going to die?" While we weep for each child, it is the parents who are our inspiration.

They are a symbol of what is noblest in each of us. They are fighting a battle that can't be won with a courage that does not always roar, but is that quiet voice at the end of the day, saying . . . I will try again tomorrow.